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CHRISTMAS AT STEBBINSES'

By MARIE IRISH
Author of "Susan Gregg's Christmas Orphans"

BECKLEY-CARDY COMPANY
Chicago

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CHARACTERS

MR. RAYMOND.....*A Well-to-do Business Man of the City*

MRS. RAYMOND.....*His Wife—a Society Woman who does not "believe in" Christmas*

MR. STEBBINS .....*A Genial Farmer*

MRS. STEBBINS.....*His Big-hearted Wife*

GRANDMA STEBBINS.....*His Old Mother*

HETTIE, TOM .....*Children of Mr. and Mrs. Stebbins*

JOE.....*An Orphan who lives with the Stebbins Family*
(As small a boy as can be procured to learn the part)

JAKE JARLEY.....*The Hired Man*

MARY .....*The "Help"*

COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP

MR. RAYMOND: Neat business suit.

MRS. RAYMOND: Stylish traveling suit; hair modishly arranged; jewelry.

MR. STEBBINS: Dark shirt, overalls; chin whiskers.

MRS. STEBBINS: Neat, plain house dress.

GRANDMA STEBBINS: Dark dress, white apron and kerchief; white hair.

HETTIE and TOM: Ordinary every-day clothes.

JOE: Calico waist, knee breeches.

JAKE: Overalls, boots, bright-colored shirt; handkerchief knotted about neck.

MARY: Gingham or calico dress, large work apron; large bow of ribbon on hair.

STAGE PROPERTIES AND ARRANGEMENT

Small table covered with bright-colored cloth; lamp with bright-colored shade; candle in candlestick; vase filled with paper flowers; one or two old-fashioned pictures on walls; several plain chairs and two rockers.

Leave a space on the wall where the stockings can be hung, if no fireplace can be arranged. At the back of the stage hang a long pair of curtains, as though before a window.

CHRISTMAS AT THE STEBBINSES'

ACT I

The Afternoon Before Christmas

Scene: *Sitting-room of Stebbins family*

Discovered Mr. *and* Mrs. Raymond, *just turning away from window.*

Mr. Raymond [*dejectedly*]. I think we shall have to make the best of the situation and remain here at least over night.

Mrs. Raymond [*shivering*]. Horrible! Stranded in such a place [*looks about scornfully*] with these country people! Can't we get to the nearest town, to a hotel?

Mr. Raymond. Impossible, my dear! [*Wanders to window and back to center stage.*] Even if our automobile had a snowplow attached to the front of it, the storm is too bad for us to venture out in. The farmer won't take one of his teams out: even the bill I showed him didn't tempt him. [*Pauses and stands, with hands in pockets, looking depressed.*]

Mrs. Raymond [*pacing up and down in an agitated manner*]. How exceedingly annoying! A fine prospect, indeed! Shut up in this place over Christmas Day—I 'd as soon be in a jail [*wrings hands*]! Why didn't we go by rail instead of in the automobile? [*Pauses before him.*] Why didn't you buy an airship last summer as I begged you to? We might have reached home then.

Mr. Raymond [*laughing*]. Had we been sailing through the heavens when this storm came on, our airship would have dropped us suddenly to earth to rest in a snowbank—a

chilling situation, to say the least! I think I like it better here. [*Strolls about room.*]

MRS. RAYMOND [*impatiently*]. Oh, *you* probably will enjoy this farm and these country people! They will be sure to have a Christmas tree or hang up their stockings—how boring!

MR. RAYMOND. Oh, come now, Laura! Make the best of it! Christmas here won't be as interesting as your Browning class, or a meeting of your Civic Welfare Society, but it won't be unbearable. Have a little Christmas spirit!—I 'm going to see if I can find a paper to read. [*Exit.*]

MRS. RAYMOND [*indignantly*]. Christmas spirit! He knows I never have time for this Christmas nonsense. I 'm as fond of Christmas as—

Enter GRANDMA STEBBINS.

GRANDMA. So 'm I fond o' Christmas! I 'm awful glad *you* like it, 'cause I want ter ask ye somethin'; only it 's a secret and ye must n't tell. Jes' set down in the rocker an' I 'll tell ye 'bout it. [*They sit down,* GRANDMA *eagerly drawing her chair close to that of* MRS. RAYMOND, *who looks much bored.*] I 'm makin' some fancy holders fer my daughter'nlaw fer a Christmas present—some ter use when comp'ny 's here, sort o' trimmed up, ye know—an' I got some ribbon fer 'em, ter bind 'em roun' the edges an' make a little bow, ye know, but I dunno whether ter put the red ribbon on the red one an' the blue ribbon on the blue one, er ter put the red ribbon on the blue one an' the blue ribbon on the red one. I knowed you wuz awful stylish soon 's I set eyes on ye, an' bein' as yer from the city, ye kin tell me which is up-to-dater. I want 'em jes' right, seein' ez they 're fer a Christmas present. [*Anxiously*] Shell I put red on red an' blue on blue; er red on blue an' blue on red? I 'm nigh worried ter death tryin' ter make up my mind!

MRS. RAYMOND [*aside, scornfully*]. The simple old thing is as much in earnest over it as I should be over some social problem or question of civic welfare! [*To* GRANDMA, *coldly*] Why, really, I think that—it would seem to me that—[*Aside, impatiently*] Goodness! I don't know whether blue should go on blue, or blue on red! [*To* GRANDMA] Really, I think perhaps your daughter would like red on the blue and blue on the red. It would be a pretty contrast. [*Aside, scornfully*] That probably will suit her taste!

GRANDMA [*happily*]. Thet 's jes' whut I thought! They look so sort o' bright an' stylish with diff'rent colors. [*Rising*] Wal, I mus' go finish 'em. They 's an awful lot ter do jes' the las' minute; but Christmas is sech a beautiful time we don't mind it. I 've lived more 'n seventy years an' I like Christmas jes' ez well ez ever. We 're awful glad yer goin' ter be here fer Christmas. Ye 'll sort o' take the place o' Cousin Henry Bing's folks whut could n't come. [*Exit.*]

MRS. RAYMOND [*sighing dolefully*]. Of all the terrible Christmas days I have ever spent this will be the worst. [*Sarcastically*] This *lovely* place!

Enter MR. STEBBINS *quickly, pausing near her.*

MR. STEBBINS. Sho, ef ye think it 's a lovely place now, ye oughter see it in summer, when the grass is green an' the trees is all leafed, an' the little chickens is runnin' round, an' the roses an' pi-nies an' snapdragon is in blossom. I dunno 's I 'd reelly call it lovely, but it suits me purty well. But the mos' important thing in a storm like this 'n is ter hev plenty o' wood an' I reckon I got cords 'nuff o' thet sawed up ter heat Rickyfiller's mansion from now till spring—I hev, by gum! I allus did like a white Christmas. But the snow 's pilin' up a leetle mite too fast jes' now; we 'll be snowed in by mornin'. Lucky thing ye

stopped here an' we 're glad ter hev ye with us. I allus did like Christmas comp'ny, by heck! You jes' make yerself right ter home, ma'am.

MRS. RAYMOND [*coldly*]. You are very kind.

MR. STEBBINS [*heartily*]. Kind nothin'! We 're glad yer here an' we got lots ter eat an' a good bed fer yer ter sleep in thet's got a bigger feather nest on it then I bet ye ever seed in the city, honest ter goodness!

MRS. RAYMOND [*emphatically*]. Oh, I *never* sleep on feathers —I don't believe in it!

MR. STEBBINS. Mebbe ye think they ain't sunnytary, er whutever the papers calls it; but those geese takes reg'lar baths in Turtle Pond an' suns 'emselves all summer; an' the wimmin folks picks 'em by hand; an' they ain't no mickeyrobes in 'em, by gum! Don't ye be 'fraid of 'em, ma'am. Ye 'll sleep so fine on 'em ye 'll think yer on one o' them flow'ry beds o' ease the singin' book tells 'bout.—But say, ma'am, bein' yer frum the city—an' I seed from yer togs thet yer purty swell—I wanter ask ye somethin', sort o' a favor like. I bought some [*looks around carefully, to see no one is listening*] stuff ter make my wife a dress—silk, too, by heck!—an' I 'm goin' ter give it to 'er fer a Christmas present. Awful purty stuff —sort o' blue, with some red an' yaller in it, an' guess they 's some green, too. It took half o' what old Brindle's spotted calf brought ter pay fer it; but sho, I didn't begrudge the money! Tildy, she sort o' wanted a black silk, but I made up my min' she 's goin' ter hev somethin' with some style an' I want you, ma'am, to tell 'er after she gits it out 'n her stockin' to-morrow mornin' jes' how ter hev it made so 's it 'll look like city clo'es. I want it swell, by jimminy!

MRS. RAYMOND [*with more graciousness than before*]. I certainly am willing to help her plan it. [*Aside*] Red and blue and green and yellow! She will look like a rainbow.

MR. STEBBINS. Thank ye, ma'am. An' ef she wants any gew-gaws er fixin's ter trim it up with, she 's goin' ter hev 'em ef it takes the rest o' old Brindle's spotted calf. I want it somethin' *swell.* But don't ye let on I said nothin'! [*Exit.*]

MRS. RAYMOND [*yawning*]. What a bore they are, with all their fuss over Christmas presents and—

Enter MARY *and stands near her.*

MARY. Oh, now, ma'am, don't worry 'bout yer Christmas presents! Those yer friends hez fer ye will keep till ye git home, an' like ez not yer husban' 's got some jewls—mebbe a diamond tirary—ready ter give ye in the mornin'. An' I bet Santy Claus 'll find yer stockin', even out here in the country, so don't ye worry no more!—An', ma'am, I wanter ask ye somethin', seein' yer frum the city an' up-ter-date on all the swellest idees. I hope ye 'll excuse me, but I can't decide by myself. Ye see, I 've made two neckties ter give fer presents. One is blue with yellow dots an' the other is red an' green striped an' I don't know which er tother ter give ter my—ter—ter the feller thet—well, he ain't my feller, but he 's allus tryin' to be sort o' sweet ter me. 'Course I ain't goin' ter take up with 'im. My sister married a p'liceman an' lives in style in Chicago, an' I don't care 'bout a country feller, but I wanter give him the purtiest tie. Which ye s'pose he 'd like best?

MRS. RAYMOND [*looking amused*]. That would depend on whether he is light or dark or has red hair or—

MARY. Well, I 'll tell ye; but don't ye breathe a word to a livin' soul, ma'am! It 's thet Jake Jarley ez stays here. You 'll see him 'fore long, 'cause it 's so stormy he 's settin' in the kitchen. He 's got a reel good heart, ef he *is* homely, but 'course I ain't goin' ter let 'im git serious.

'T ain't serious ter give 'im a red an' green tie, is it, ma'am?

MRS. RAYMOND [*smiling*]. I hope it won't have a serious effect. If he is strong he ought to be able to stand the colors.

MARY [*seriously*]. Yes, the colors *is* lovely! Ef it ain't too much ter ask, won't ye please give 'im the look over after a while an' tell me which tie ye think 'll suit 'im best? Ain't Christmas a lovely time? I can't hardly wait till ter-morrer mornin' ter see whut Jake—I mean—whut presents I git. Lan' sakes, I mus' git back ter my work! [*Starts for door, then pauses.*] 'Course I don't care 'bout Jake Jarley, but I 'd like ter give 'im the tie ez suits 'im best. [*Exit.*]

MRS. RAYMOND [*rising impatiently and walking about*]. To think I must listen to all this nonsense about Christmas, when I don't believe in Christmas or in giving Christmas presents, or in all this sentiment about the Christmas spirit! I wonder if they 'll insist on my hanging up my stocking! [*Sinks into chair again.*]

Enter JAKE *and pauses near her.*

JAKE [*reassuringly*]. Wal, now, ma'am, don't ye worry 'bout yer stockin'! Ef ye don't wanter hang up yourn 'cause it 's got a hole in, er somethin', while yer off vis'tin', I 'll jes' fix ye out. The folks here hez been teasin' me 'bout my sock bein' too little ter hang up on Christmas Eve, an' the gals offered ter lend me a long un, but I fixed 'em! I bought some bright caliker at the store las' week an' I sewed a piece onter the top o' my sock, so I reckon it 'll hold quite a load an' then some. I 'll fix one like it fer you, if yer stockin' ain't in trim. Got plenty caliker an' I 'm real handy with a needle.

MRS. RAYMOND. Oh, no, no! thank you! I shan't need it.

JAKE. Ma'am, I 'd—I 'd like ter ask ye—somethin'.

MRS. RAYMOND [*resignedly*]. Certainly, if I can help you, I am willing. [*Aside*] Heavens! I seem to have become a Bureau of Christmas Information!

JAKE [*sitting down bashfully on the edge of a chair*]. I wanter ask ye—somethin'.

MRS. RAYMOND [*kindly*]. Yes?

JAKE [*looking around cautiously*]. Yer frum the city, I s'pose.

MRS. RAYMOND. Yes.

JAKE. I thought so. Yer dress looks so kinder—well, so sorter citified, an' yer shoes fit so snug, an' yer hair looks so—so swell.

MRS. RAYMOND. Yes?

JAKE. An' I s'pose in the city ye go ter them wimmin's clubs the papers tells about an' all sorts er meetin's.

MRS. RAYMOND [*smiling*]. Oh, yes.

JAKE. I wonder now, ma'am, if ye ever tried yer hand at—at po'try.

MRS. RAYMOND [*looking mystified*]. Poultry? Why, no. I have never tried to raise chickens.

JAKE. Poultry! Who said anything 'bout raisin' chickens! I said *po'try*—this sorter writin' thet hez jinglin' words on the end o' the lines, like cat, rat, mat, hat, fat, scat. Like

> My gal an' me went fer a walk,
> An' we set down ter hev a talk.

MRS. RAYMOND [*laughing*]. Oh, I see! No, I am afraid I'm not a poet.

JAKE. Wal, I kin run a plow er husk corn with the best of 'em, but hang-ding my boots ef I kin do much at writin' po'try! I wanter give a Christmas present to a young lady an' I got a awful big bottle er perfume-ry. It 's called "New-mown Hay." Did ye ever hear 'bout thet kind, ma'am?

MRS. RAYMOND. Oh, yes, I have heard of it.

JAKE. Wal, I got thet kind 'cause I thought it 'd kinder remind 'er o' the times I 'd made eyes at 'er when she 'd bring us lunch out ter the hayfield. The man in the store said 't wuz swell stuff, all right, an' I think "New-mown Hay" sounds awful nice, no matter how it smells. Now I 'm tryin' ter write a few lines o' po'try ter go with it an' shucks ter goodness ef I ain't got stuck!

MRS. RAYMOND [*wearily*]. I 'm afraid I can't help you. [*Rises and walks about,* JAKE *following.*]

JAKE [*pulling paper from pocket*]. I got this. [*Reads in singsong voice.*]

> Oh, damzell fair with lovely hair,
> Yer smile is bright an' yer all right;
> So fer a present on Christmas Day
> Ex-cept this bottle o' New-mown Hay.
> A merry Christmas Day be thine,—

an' now I can't git the nex' line. "Hang up the holly an' the pine," jingles all right, but it don't sound right. "May our hearts with love entwine," suits me all right, but it don't jes' go with the rest o' it. But what kin I say?

MRS. RAYMOND [*with more interest*]. Why can't you use a line ending with "mine"?

JAKE [*thoughtfully*]. "Mine"? "Mine"? "An' may ye some day soon be mine"—thet 's it, by ginger! [*Reads all the lines aloud, adding the last.*] Say, thet 's jes' fine! I knew ye could help me, ma'am. [*He takes her hand and shakes it awkwardly from side to side.*] Thank ye kindly fer helpin' me! Paid three dollars fer thet perfume-ry an' this pome 's worth three more—six dollars, by heck! [*Exit.*]

MRS. RAYMOND [*laughing ruefully as she sits down again*]. To think of spending Christmas with this family, admiring their dreadful gifts! How shall I ever stand it! I suppose they believe in Santa Claus.

Enter JOE.

JOE. 'Course we b'lieve in Santy Claus! He 's a awful nice old man an' he brings presents ter the chil'ren whut 's good. Grandma knows lots o' stories 'bout Santy an' so does Jake. I told Jake I wanted Santy ter bring me a sled ter-morrer an' he said he wuz goin' ter send 'im word so 's he 'd sure bring it. Jake 's awful good.—Do ye know the story 'bout the Babe, ma'am? [*Perches on chair near her.*]

MRS. RAYMOND. What babe?

JOE. Wy, the Bethlehem Babe thet Grandma tells 'bout! He come ter bring love ter the world an' blessin's ter poor folks, an' bring Christmas spirit so 's folks 'd wanter make others happy an' think it 's more blessed to give 'n to receive. I s'pose yer one o' the good Christmas spirits.

MRS. RAYMOND [*a little impatiently*]. What do you mean?

JOE. Wy, ef I 's a lovely lady like you I 'd be one o' the good Christmas spirits thet gives lots o' presents an' makes poor folks happy an' makes selfish people be kind an' lovin' 'cause o' the Bethlehem Babe.

MRS. RAYMOND [*gravely*]. No, I 'm not one of those spirits. [*Aside*] Dear me! it is years since I tried to make any one happy at Christmas time! I wonder if I could.

JOE. I 'm goin' ter give some Christmas presents. Part of 'em I made myself. I made a necktie holder fer Jake out o' some pine branches an' painted it with some red paint left frum the barn. Mary says it 's reel purty. You 'll hang up yer stockin', won't ye?

MRS. RAYMOND [*coldly*]. I think not.

JOE. Oh, please do! They 'll be awful sorry ef ye don't, 'cause—

MRS. RAYMOND. Because of what?

JOE. Don't tell I told ye, but the folks is goin' ter help Santy fill yer stocking ter-night so 's ye won't feel lonesome

here. [*Voice calls off stage.*] Thet 's Hettie callin'—I 'll hev to go. [*Runs off.*]

MRS. RAYMOND [*very thoughtfully*]. I wonder if there *is* something in this Christmas spirit, after all. Have I been missing happiness all these years because I have not believed in Christmas sentiment?—These people certainly have kind hearts. Perhaps Christmas won't be so bad here. I wonder how the storm is. [*Goes to back of stage and stands behind curtains as though looking out at window, hidden from view.*]

Enter TOM.

TOM [*looking around carefully*]. Thank goodness, she 's gone! Maw sent me in ter poke the fire an' I wuz 'fraid she 'd—wal, I don't s'pose she 'd bite, but she mighter froze me up, she looks so sort o' frosty! No wonder this room is chilly.—I wonder if Sis 'll like this cameo pin I got fer 'er. [*Takes box from pocket and looks at pin.*] Wisht I could make 'er think Sim Hawks sent it.

Enter HETTIE.

HETTIE. Where 's the lady?

TOM [*thrusting box into pocket*]. Guess she went upstairs. Don't seem ter be here. Ain't she an icicle? Wow! She thinks we 're rubes an' hayseeds.

HETTIE. Oh, I think she 's lovely! You 'd be proud, too, ef ye was *rich!*

TOM. Would n't neither! I 'd be common like Senator Denning—jolly the farmers' wives an' kiss all the kids.

HETTIE. Ye silly thing!—Say, Tom, whut wuz thet box ye hed in yer hand when I come in?

TOM. Whut box?

HETTIE. Thet box ye hed in yer hand.

TOM. Say, Miss Smarty, I guess I kin give a Christmas present ter one o' my gal friends ef I please ter do so. Thet 's a secret.

HETTIE. Oh, ye mean thing, not ter tell me! It 's thet horrid Nell Haskins yer goin' to give it to, so!

Enter MRS. STEBBINS.

MRS. STEBBINS. Where 's Miss Raymond?

HETTIE. Tom says she 's gone upstairs.

MRS. STEBBINS. Wal, Hettie, you find thet collar ye crocheted fer Aunt Minty. Ye can make another one fer yer aunt an' we 'll give this 'n to Miss Raymond. City folks allus likes sech crochet work an' ye did thet reel nice. I 'll give 'er some jelly—good ez she 'll git in the city—an' Grandma 'll give 'er some tattin'. We want 'er ter hev a merry Christmas, ef we *be* jes' country folks. I kin give 'er some pickles, too, an' some perserves. The magyzines says sech presents is reel pop'lar now. Joey is awful taken with 'er—thinks she 's a reg'lar Christmas fairy, I guess. Wal, it must be most supper time. Come on. [*Exeunt.*]

MRS. RAYMOND [*coming from behind curtain*]. Oh, dear, it was shocking of me to listen, but how could I help it! It would have been dreadful if they had known I heard. So the boy thinks I 'm an icicle. Well, I *have* behaved in a cold and horrid way. What hearts they have! I ought to be proud to know them and I mean to be as nice as I can to them from now on. I shall do my best to make this a happy Christmas for us all and I shall even hang up my stocking to please them. What would my friends say to that! I am going to show some of that Christmas spirit the Bethlehem Babe brought to the world so long ago. [*Exit.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

The Night Before Christmas

Scene: *As before*

Discovered, Mr. *and* Mrs. Stebbins *and* Mr. *and* Mrs. Raymond, *all seated.*

Mrs. Raymond. Mrs. Stebbins, I cannot say how much I enjoyed your supper. I have never eaten a more delicious meal!

Mr. Stebbins. Wal, ef ye think thet wuz a hummer, jes' wait 'll we 've hed our Christmas dinner, ter-morrer. Thet 's goin' ter be worthy o' old Santy Claus hisself, by heck! I says ter Tildy, says I, long 's they 's somethin' in the house ter cook I 'm goin' ter hev a good squar' meal on Christmas, ef it 's the only one I git 'n the year, by gum!

Mr. Raymond. Really, my friends, I cannot express my gratitude for this warm welcome to us on our stormy journey! This is going to be the most enjoyable Christmas I have spent in years, because it seems like old times. I used to live on a farm and shall never forget the happy Christmas days I spent there. But [*rising*] what can we do to help get ready for to-morrow? Is n't there some corn to pop? How about some nuts to crack?

Mrs. Raymond [*eagerly, as she rises*]. Please let us help with something; I should love to!

Mr. Stebbins [*rising*]. Wal, they 's 'bout a bushel o' butternuts an' hick'ries ter be cracked, sayin' nuthin' o' the corn the folks wants popped.

Mrs. Stebbins [*rising*]. Joey wants some strings o' popcorn ter deckyrate with.

Mrs. Raymond. Well, I will string corn. I surely can do that.

MR. RAYMOND. Where 's a hammer to tackle those nuts with? [*Pulls up sleeves.*]

MR. STEBBINS. Right this way! [*Exeunt.*]

Enter JAKE, MARY, HETTIE, TOM, *and* JOE, *each carrying evergreen.*

JAKE. It 's a lucky thing we got these Christmas greens this mornin' 'fore the storm begun.

HETTIE. I should say so! It 'd be too bad not ter hev 'em ter deckyrate with.

MARY. I sure do love green things at Christmas time!

JAKE. Oh, Mary, how good o' ye ter say so! [*Moves nearer to her.*]

MARY. An' why so, indeed?

JAKE. 'Cause then ye must love me. [*Smiles at her.*]

MARY. Go 'long, silly! I wuz meanin' *purty* green things! Come now, let 's git these deckyrations up.

TOM. Jake, you git up on a chair an' fasten 'em ter the wall.

JAKE. I will ef Mary 'll hold me so 's I don't fall.

MARY. Hold ye nothin'! I 'll give ye a push on the floor ef ye don't hush up!

JOE. I 'll git a cushion fer ye ter fall on ef ye want me to, Jake.

HETTIE. Now do be quiet an' git these greens up 'fore the city lady comes in! [JAKE *climbs on chair and hangs evergreens on wall. Some can be made into a wreath; some can be fastened to string for a festoon, and some bunches merely hung on nails over pictures and at back of stage.* HETTIE *can pin some bunches on the curtains.* MARY *directs* JAKE *as he hangs greens, while* TOM *and* JOE *hand him decorations.*]

JAKE. An' now how 's this fer a Merry Christmas? [*Looks proudly at work, still standing on chair.*]

MARY. Sho, we can't tell till ye git down; yer thet green we keep gittin' ye mixed up with the deckyrations. [*All laugh as* JAKE *gets down.*]

JOE. I think it looks jes' fine! We 'll hev a lovely time ter-morrer with our presents, an' the Christmas dinner, an' thet nice lady fer comp'ny.

HETTIE. Let 's go help 'er string popcorn, Joey.

JOE. All right. [*Exeunt* HETTIE *and* JOE.]

TOM. Me, too! I 'm beginnin' ter like the icicle, I swan I be! [*Exit.*]

MARY. I think I 'll go wrap up some presents, so 's they 'll be ready.

JAKE [*bashfully*]. Ma-ry.

MARY [*coldly*]. Yes, Mr. Jarley?

JAKE. I—I—[*takes handkerchief from pocket, wipes face, then stands twisting one corner of handkerchief round and round*] I—wanter say— somethin'.

MARY. Yes, Mr. Jarley?

JAKE [*shyly moving nearer*]. I wanter—say—thet—[MARY *looks at him scornfully and he jumps back from her*] thet—it 's stormin' awful hard.

MARY [*as though surprised*]. Is thet *so!*

JAKE. M-a-ry, be ye—ever goin'—

MARY. Goin' where?

JAKE. Ter git married?

MARY. I should say I be! My sister married er official in the big city o' Chicago, a awful grand man.

JAKE [*cast down*]. Sho, you don't say!

MARY. Yes, he 's a p'liceman an' he looks somethin' grand in his uniform. I 'm goin' ter git a city man, too—no rube fer me!

JAKE [*tragically*]. I 'm goin' out inter the storm an' perish in the cold blast! [*Dashes across stage and runs into*

HETTIE, *who enters, carrying some broken dishes wrapped in paper. She lets dishes crash to ground.*]

HETTIE. There, see whut ye made me do! Now my lovely teaset 's all smashed ter bits, an' it was Grandma's Christmas present! You horrid Jake Jarley! [*She runs from stage.*]

JAKE [*looking ruefully at broken dishes*]. Gee whiz! [*To* MARY] There, ye busted my heart jes' like them dishes is busted. [*Puts hand on stomach.*]

MARY [*scornfully*]. Oh, ye silly thing! Ye don't know yer heart from yer stomach. [*Goes out haughtily.*]

JAKE [*wiping first one eye and then the other with handkerchief*]. I—ain't—er feelin'—bad—'bout my busted heart, but—I wisht—I hed thet three dollars back! Ef thet cru-el damzell wants any new-mown hay, she kin get it out 'n the haycock nex' summer! [*Exit.*]

Enter MRS. RAYMOND *and* JOE.

MRS. RAYMOND. What do you want for Christmas, Joey?

JOE. Oh, a story book, an' a sled, an'—I want a watch, but 'course I can't hev thet 'cause it costs too much. An' they 's one thing I want most o' all, but I can't hev thet, neither.

MRS. RAYMOND. What is that?

JOE. Oh, I must n 't talk 'bout thet. Jake says it 's naughty. But—mebbe I 'll tell ye ter-morrer, 'cause I—I like ye.

MRS. RAYMOND. All right, Joey. Now you must run to bed, so that you will wake early in the morning. Good-night.

JOE. Good-night, ma'am. [*Exit.*]

MRS. RAYMOND. What a dear boy! It 's very strange—he reminds me of some one. His face seems familiar, but I certainly have never seen him before. [*Sighs.*] How I wish Santa Claus would bring me a boy like that for a Christmas present!

Enter MR. *and* MRS. STEBBINS, MR. RAYMOND, TOM, HETTIE, *and* MARY.

MR. STEBBINS. Now, all you folks git yer stockin's hung up, so 's old Santy kin fill 'em when he comes.

MRS. STEBBINS. Wal, I 've got one here fer me an' one fer Miss Raymond. [*She hangs them up. Each person either hangs a stocking on the wall or fastens it to a chair.* TOM *has a long colored one;* MR. STEBBINS *produces from his pocket two colored socks, one being for* MR. RAYMOND. *Each stocking has its owner's name written on a card and pinned on. Each person should make some remark while fastening up the stocking, such as, "I hope I 'll find somethin' nice in mine," "Hope I 'll git some good candy," "Guess Santy kin tell mine all right," etc.*]

HETTIE. I 've hung up Joe's fer 'im. He went ter bed so 's ter wake up early.

MR. STEBBINS. But where 's Jake? He ain't got his hung up. [*Shouts*] Jake, bring thet 'ere sock here an' hang it, er ye won't git no Christmas presents, by heck!

Enter JAKE *with sock having long bright top attached.*

MRS. STEBBINS. Wal, lan' sakes, Jake, ef yer name ain't on thet, Santy 'll think it belongs ter one o' the wimmin!

MARY. I hope he won't think it 's mine!

JAKE. Say, now, don't you folks make fun o' my Christmas sock, 'cause I 'm hopin' ter git somethin' mighty fine in it. [*Hangs it up.*]

Enter GRANDMA, *with stocking and basket of packages.*

MRS. STEBBINS. Wal, mother, I wuz jes' thinkin' it 's time ye brought yer stockin'. Sakes alive, ye 'll spoil yer eyes, workin' so late!

GRANDMA [*happily*]. Oh, Christmas comes but once a year. [*Hangs stocking.*] Now let 's all sing somethin' 'fore we

go ter bed. [*All sing "While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night," or some other Christmas song.*]

MR. STEBBINS. Now, them ez wants ter leave their bundles here fer ma an' me ter put in the correck stockin's, kin do so; the rest o' ye kin slip down later an' put 'em in ter suit yerselves. Only, hands up, no peekin'. [*All raise hands and cry, "No peekin'!"*]

MR. RAYMOND. Friends, this is the best time I 've had in years! Now I 'm going to bed, so as to get up early and enjoy to-morrow, Christmas on the farm. [*Good-nights are said,* MR. *and* MRS. RAYMOND *exeunt;* TOM *and* HETTIE *bring in packages and exeunt;* GRANDMA *sets basket on table and retires.* MR. *and* MRS. STEBBINS *exeunt.*]

JAKE [*bashfully*]. Ma-ry.

MARY [*calmly*]. Yes, Mr. Jarley?

JAKE. Ye 'll make my Christmas awful merry—ef—ef ye 'll gimme jes' one thing.

MARY. An' whut 's thet?

JAKE. A—a—somethin' beginnin' with a "k."

MARY. Even though ye should need it, let me say, Mr. Jake Jarley, I 'm too dignified ter give a man a—kick.

JAKE. Kick? Who said anything 'bout a kick? I mean a—a—*kiss!* [*Puckers up lips and gives loud smack.*]

MARY. Wal, here 't is. [*Smacks her lips at him and runs from stage.*]

JAKE. Jes' my blame luck! Did n't even hit me! [*Exit.*]

Enter MR. *and* MRS. STEBBINS.

MRS. STEBBINS. Now let 's put things in quick, fer I 'm dead tired. [*They quickly put packages in various stockings. Old toys and bundles of paper can be used to make packages.*]

MR. STEBBINS. Did ye fix up some reel nice things ter give Mr. an' Miss Raymond? We don't want 'em ter feel like they did n't git nothin'.

MRS. STEBBINS. Yes, I think they 'll be pleased. Guess we 've got things fixed now. [*Blows out lamp while* MR. STEBBINS *lights candle, which they leave burning. Room should be darkened so there is as little light on stage as possible except the one candle. Exeunt.*]

Enter JOE *barefoot, hair rumpled, clothes all awry as though pulled on quickly.*

JOE [*rubbing eyes*]. I wonder ef it 's mornin' yit. Which is my stockin'? [*Looks around.*]

Enter MRS. RAYMOND, *wearing kimona and cap and carrying packages.*

MRS. RAYMOND. Why, Joe, what are you doing here?

JOE. I thought 't wuz mornin'. I want ter see whut Santy brought.

MRS. RAYMOND. Oh, it is n't morning! The others have just gone to bed.

JOE. I know whut I want most of all, but I can't hev it. I want some o' my own folks—my reelly own.

MRS. RAYMOND [*gently*]. What do you mean?

JOE. Wy, I don't reelly belong ter these folks. They jes' keep me 'cause my mother died.

MRS. RAYMOND [*quickly*]. What was your mother's name?

JOE. Alice Denton. [MRS. RAYMOND *starts, letting fall packages.*] It 's down in a book. I 've got 'er picture. [*Pulls out small bag tied around his neck, takes out little picture and shows* MRS. RAYMOND.]

MRS. RAYMOND. Alice! My sister! [*Kneels beside* JOE, *and puts arms around him.*] Joe, dear, you are my Sister Alice's boy. We heard—I thought—you had died too. Oh, you dear boy! What a wonderful Christmas gift for us!

JOE [*bewildered*]. An' can I come ter see ye sometimes, please, ma'am?

MRS. RAYMOND [*rising*]. You shall go home with me to stay, Joe dear! [*Puts her arm around his shoulders.*] I am going to be your mother, dear.

JOE. Then I don't want no other presents! This is enough.

MRS. RAYMOND. But now you must run back to bed. [*Gently*] Good-night, dear boy! [*Exit* JOE.] Oh, how thankful I am we stopped here! Suppose we had passed him by! [*Clasps her hands.*] My Alice's son!—But I must hurry or some one will come. How nice that I have some pretty things with me that I can give these good people for gifts! [*Gathers up packages and puts them in various stockings.*] I know this pretty little ring I bought this morning will fit Hettie and I have some bills that will make useful presents.

Enter JAKE, *wearing long dark coat.*

JAKE [*aside*]. Oh, thank my stars, here 's Mary! [MRS. RAYMOND, *her back to him, is putting something into his sock.*] An' she 's puttin' somethin' in my sock, by ginger! I bet she kinder likes me, after all. Wisht she 'd give me a kiss in place o' the one thet did n't hit me. [*Goes over softly to* MRS. RAYMOND.] Oh, Mary, darlin' damzell [MRS. RAYMOND *straightens up*], I could jes' die o' love fer ye an' ef ye 'll hev me I 'll live on joy ferever.

MRS. RAYMOND [*facing him*]. Mercy! how you frightened me!

JAKE [*starting back*]. Great—land o' Goshen, 't ain't Mary! Wy, I—excuse me, ma'am—I—

MRS. RAYMOND [*laughing*]. I suppose you took me for Mary because I was putting something into your sock. Well, don't be discouraged, Mr. Jarley; you will have another chance to woo Mary and [*warmly*] I hope, win her. [*Exit.*]

JAKE. Shucks! Wasted all thet love-makin' on the wrong woman! Wal, I mus' put this bottle o' perfume-ry in

Mary's stockin' an' git ter bed. [*Sets bottle on chair.*] I b'lieve I 'll jes' write, "I love ye," at the bottom o' thet po'try. Where 's my lead pencil? Guess it 's in my pocketbook. [*Goes over to candle, takes pocketbook from trousers pocket and hunts for pencil, jingling money as he does so.*]

Enter MARY.

MARY [*aside*]. Oh, mercy goodness! There 's a burglar! Been robbin' us an' now he 's countin' the money! Oh, I 'm scart ter death! But I ain't goin' ter let 'im git away. Who 's 'fraid o' a man? [*Runs across stage, catches* JAKE *by shoulders, throws him to floor, picks up chair and fastens him down with it.*] Now, ye mean thief, I 'll show ye! Ye ain't goin' ter rob this house on Christmas Eve—not while I 'm here! [*Calls*] Thief, murder, fire, robbers!

JAKE. Land o' Goshen, Mary! Whut 's the matter? Lemme up!

MARY. Oh, oh, mercy, Jake! Hev I hurt ye? [*Takes chair away.* JAKE *rises slowly and* MARY *falls against him. He puts arm around her.*] Oh, I—I 'm scart ter death!

JAKE. No, ye ain't, neither.

Enter MR. STEBBINS, *barefooted and with blanket around him;* MR. RAYMOND *wearing long bath-robe;* MRS. RAYMOND *and* HETTIE *in kimonas.*

MR. STEBBINS. Whut—whut 's the matter? House on fire?

MR. RAYMOND. No, some one said robbers. Are we being robbed?

JAKE [*shyly*]. It 's a—a Christmas mistake. They ain't nothin' wrong.

HETTIE. Oh, see where his arm is!

MARY [*trying to release herself*]. Jake, I—I—feel silly 'nough ter hide—in yer Christmas sock!

JAKE [*happily*]. Oh, Mary, ef ye 'd only do it, it 'd be all the present I could ask, now an' ferever!

MR. RAYMOND. Hurrah for Jake's Christmas sock! It certainly has brought him the best present a man can have. But, good folks, it is very late. I move that we all go to bed, so we can be ready to-morrow for—

ALL. —a Merry Christmas!

CURTAIN

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